DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 644 CS 504 534

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TITLE A Matter of Choice.
PUB DATE 19 Feb 84
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Seattle, WA, February 18-21, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; Higher Education; Language Usage; *Liberal Arts; Personal Autonomy; *Speech Communication; Speech Instruction; Symbolic Language
IDENTIFIERS Freedom; Freedom of Choice

ABSTRACT

The intent of a liberal education is to enhance the student's freedom, the faculty of intentional choice. The capacity of humans to step outside of themselves, which allows development of self-concept and subsequently self-esteem, is potentiated by the humans' unique sign, the symbol. Each of the liberal arts is concerned with the development and augmentation of the individual capacity to use symbols. Through the symbol, humans acquire the capacity for conscious intent and it is conscious intent that produces freedom. The development of spoken language is the prerequisite for the natural development of the symbol. The discipline of speech communication is absolutely necessary for the study of any other liberal art, and therefore holds a necessary place in every liberal arts curriculum. (HTH)

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Western Speech Communication Association Convention
Sunday, February 19, 1984
2:40pm - 3:55pm

PROGRAM TITLE: IN DEFENSE OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION AS A LIBERAL ART

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A MATTER OF CHOICE

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Slaves are generally forbidden education. The slave has no free time to learn subjects not directly bearing on the affairs of the slave's master or mistress. Education may tend to increase the slave's dissatisfaction with his or her condition. Education may provide the slave with the conceptual wherewithall and the internal conviction leading to rebellion. The slave must be kept enslaved to time, to place, and to ignorance of all but the essentials of survival.

Historically there was a time when almost all of humanity was enslaved. Humans were enslaved by the demands of the land which only grudgingly yielded the food and water necessary for life. Humans were enslaved by the demands of the environment, by the prevalence of disease, by a short life-span. Humans were held in bondage by an ignorance of alternatives to the demands of the moment.

For a slave there are seldom any alternatives to the harsh realities of day by day existence. Slaves have no choice.

Only the freed person, the liberated person , can enjoy the luxury of withdrawing from the labors of survival so as to develop the faculty of intentional choice.

By a liberal education, partially constituted of the study of the liberal "arts", is meant an education for the liberated person. An education the intent of which is to enhance the student's liberation, the student's freedom.

CS 504 534

Somerset Maugham's "razor's edge," Piet Mondrian's lines, Georges Seurat's points, the stimulus differentiation of classical conditioning, the rigor of dialectical reasoning, the elastic specificity of mathematics, each emphasizes the delicate balance between too far and too close, between might and must, between freedom and slavery.

The point of decision is always a point of choice.

Choice is the instrument of liberation.

Choice is the instrument of freedom.

Professional education is preparation for the proper fulfillment of a social role (such as physician, attorney, teacher, etc.). The success of a program of professional education is often reflected in some type of professional certification.

Liberal education is preparation for the appropriate fulfillment of what seems to be an internal human imperative to the progressive acquisition of autonomy. The success of a program of liberal education is reflected in the quality of an individual's choices across the life span.

Slaves are forbidden freedom. Animals are enslaved by nature. The sign, that which is part of that which it announces, is the communicative instrument of the animal. The sign is itself enslaved to that of which it is a sign.

> A sign announces that of which it is itself a part.
>
> A symbol demands separation from that to which it refers. A symbol is an arbitrary comment upon something else. A symbol must be different from, apart from, that to which the symbol refers. [Dance,1983,p.48]

The human capacity to step outside of him or herself -- a capacity which allows the human to develop a self-concept and subsequently self-esteem-- is initiated and potentiated by the human's unique sign, the symbol.[Dance, 1975.] The symbol is the means by which the human can "de-center," can move away from the

immediacy of self or of the moment so as to develop an overview that fosters choice. If one is rooted in a single place, a single moment, or an unyielding unity of being then it is impossible to develop an overview that fosters choice. The symbol, initiated though speech and developed though spoken language enables one to conceive of and to envision and to hold in memory points outside of oneself (points in other places or in other times), and thus fosters and mandates the capacity of choice.

Each of the liberal arts is concerned with the development and augmentation of the individual capacity to use symbols. The use of language in general and then the use of specific languages, such as mathematics, philosophy, chemistry, sociology, English, et al. constitute the liberal arts which allow the individual to gain ever widening control over symbols and their specific application.

Humans, through the symbol, de-center first from self and then de-center from the immediacy of the chronological moment and of geographical space. The Liberal Arts are those which augment either the first or the second (or both) of these de-centerings.

Another implication of the symbol as the human species-specific de-centering device is that it is through the symbol, that the human being acquires the capacity for conscious intent and it is conscious intent that is manifested in the choice which is the instrument of liberation, the instrument of freedom.

Although the development of symbols originally freed the human race from bondage to signs this process of symbol acquisition must be repeated by each individual human being. It is through individual speech that the process of symbol acquisition for the individual is initiated and thus replicated.

1. Speech, human soundmaking, provides the oral-aural experience leading to the infant's perception and utilization of contrast. (Whereas speech has developmental primacy in the initiation of symbolization, the possibility exists that in the absence of speech and with sufficient expert assistance other modalities may eventually result in symbolic development in the human

being.)

2. Contrast leads to the infant's acqusition of incipient decentering and proto-symbolization.

3. Incipient decentering, within a nurturing spoken language milieu, eventuates in the infant's competence and performance of symbolization.

4. The symbol, once developed and integrated into spoken language (around 18 months of age) augments ever more refined and precise symbolization on the part of the human child. [Dance, 1979; 1983,p.49]

Although this essay focuses on the relationship between speech and choice as these two bear upon a liberal education, anyone arguing for the place of speech communication in a liberal arts education should also stress the functions of spoken language (Linking, Mentation, and Regulation) which I have addressed elsewhere. [Dance and Larson, 1976.]

Technology multiplies human mobility, the fine arts expand human risk-taking proclivities, and the liberal arts prepare humans for making the informed choices which arise from the contributions of technology and art. The technological advances in mass media emphasize the role of the symbol in informing the citizenry of a democracy. Art and music push the citizen to the edges of experience. The liberal arts assist the individual in making informed choices concerning the products of the mass media and the experiences of the arts.

The development of speech and spoken language is the prerequisite for the natural development of the symbol. That

academic discipline which has the study of speech and spoken language as its primary subject matter is the discipline of speech communication.

Speech is necessary for the symbol.

The symbol is necessary for choice.

Choice is necessary for intentionality.

Choice and intentionality are necessary for freedom.

Freedom is a sine qua non for the liberal arts.

Speech communication is the discipline having as its primary subject matter the study of speech and spoken language.

The study of spoken language, imbedded in the discipline of speech communication, is a study absolutely necessary for the study of any other liberal art. Therefore speech communication holds a necessary place in each liberal arts curriculum and must be a required study for each liberal arts student. Whether to not to include speech communication as a required discipline at all levels of formal education may be seen as a matter of choice in which the choice must always be for its inclusion.

ENDNOTES

Dance, Frank E.X. Speech communication:the sign of mankind. Great ideas today, 1975. Chicago :Encyclopedia Britannica Press, 1975, 40-57;98-100. The usage of such terms as "sign," "symbol," "speech," "spoken language," et al. in this essay is bound to the taxonomy of the speech theory of human communication.

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